

BLESSED ARE YOU?

Would you describe yourself as blessed? Are you a bit puzzled as to the actual meaning of this Bible word? It's used several times in Jesus' sermon recorded in Luke 6:17-26.

Jesus had been on a mountain all night in prayer, and chose twelve apostles that morning. Then He came down with them to a level place, where a great multitude of people had gathered.

1- JESUS ATTRACTS GREAT CROWDS - People had come several days' journey, from as far south as Judea and Jerusalem, and from the northwest seaports of Tyre and Sidon. They stood in a great arc, His apostles and disciples closest, then the crowds stretching beyond.

They came "to hear and to be healed." Luke says "those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch Him, for power came out from Him and healed them all." This was just as promised in Luke 4, because He was anointed by the Holy Spirit.

2- JESUS ALLAYS THEIR AILMENTS - Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, deliverance to the oppressed. By God's grace, the age of Messiah, the time of the Christ, has come! And God's power comes with Him.

Jesus demonstrated His divine ability, extending from His divine authority, as the promised Christ. The Son of God had come in the flesh to fulfill all God's promises for the redemption of His people. And this healing power was prelude to His healing words.

3- JESUS ADDRESSES HIS DISCIPLES - Tourists are told that Jesus taught from a beautiful hillside slope overlooking the Sea of Galilee near the town of Capernaum. Here on this level place, Jesus levels with His followers. Verse 20 says, "He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'."

Wait, that sounds like the "sermon on the mount" in Matthew 5-7. Luke's account contains a few textual differences. Whether this was the same occasion or another, Jesus taught similar content in various settings in the Gospel records. And the writers often arranged material topically.

4- JESUS' WORDS APPLY TODAY - Luke notes that He addressed His disciples, and was overheard by the crowds. Jesus spoke specifically to His hearers then and there, but by extension His words apply to followers of Christ today (1 Cor 1:20-21). Let's listen in!

First note, Jesus speaks to those who follow Him, not just those who hear Him. His disciples were those who heard and heeded His words. Not just those who nebulously acknowledge His existence, but who put all their trust in Jesus Christ. Luke 4:43 speaks of those who responded to Christ's teaching of the good news of the kingdom of God. Let's be like them!

5- JESUS ANNOUNCES BLESSING - To those who followed Him, Jesus said, "blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." What does blessed mean? No one English word captures the extent of meaning in the Greek. Translations include happy, fortunate, favored.

Scholars note that one may be blessed but feel no happiness. 'Blessed' is a condition brought about by God, and is a state of being with or because of God's grace, notes JC Ryle. It refers to spiritual well-being, receiving God's favor or grace, regardless of your circumstance. This reality becomes more obvious as we read further as Jesus speaks blessings.

6- JESUS ACCENTS BEATITUDE - The phrase "blessed are you" is a "beatitude" which is a statement which begins with a pronouncement of benediction or good will. This has roots in the Old Testament prophets, who spoke oracles of weal or woe, good things versus bad things, blessings and curses, positive versus negative consequences.

For example, Isaiah 30-31 and Jeremiah 17:5-7 speaks of blessing to those who wait upon the Lord and consult His words, but woe to those who trust in their own counsel, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. Moses spoke likewise in Deuteronomy 27-30.

7- ARE YOU HEARING AND HEEDING? In Deuteronomy 18:15 God promised a prophet "like Moses" would come, and says "it is to Him you shall listen." This is the anointed one of Luke 4, Jesus Christ, the Son of God come in the flesh (John 1:14-18,45, Acts 3:18-25, Heb 3:1-6).

As the Lord God said in Luke 9:35, "This is My son, My Chosen One, listen to Him!" □